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been determined to be owed to the Commission by an individual that has not been paid by the date specified in the demand or order for payment, or applicable agreement. For purposes of this subpart, the terms “debt” and “claim” are synonymous.

Disposable pay means that part of the debtor’s compensation (including, but not limited to, salary, bonuses, commissions, and vacation pay) from an employer remaining after the deduction of health insurance premiums and any amounts required by law to be withheld. For purposes of this subpart, “amounts required by law to be withheld” include amounts for deductions such as social security taxes and withholding taxes, but do not include any amount withheld pursuant to a court order.

Employer means a person or entity that employs the services of others and that pays their wages or salaries. The term employer includes, but is not limited to, State and local Governments, but does not include an agency of the Federal Government.

Garnishment means the process of withholding amounts from an employee’s disposable pay and the paying of those amounts to a creditor in satisfaction of a withholding order.

Withholding order means any order for withholding or garnishment of pay issued by an agency, or judicial or administrative body. For purposes of this subpart, the terms “wage garnishment order” and “garnishment order” have the same meaning as “withholding order.”

§ 204.63 Notice.

(a) At least 30 days before the initiation of garnishment proceedings, the Commission will mail, by first class mail to the debtor’s last known address, a written notice informing the debtor of:

- (1) The nature and amount of the debt;
- (2) The Commission’s intention to initiate proceedings to collect the debt through deductions from pay until the debt and all accumulated interest, penalties and administrative costs are paid in full; and
- (3) An explanation of the debtor’s rights, including those set forth in

paragraph (b) of this section, and the time frame within which the debtor may exercise these rights.

(b) The debtor will be afforded the opportunity:

(1) To inspect and copy records related to the debt;

(2) To enter into a written repayment agreement with the Commission, under terms agreeable to the Commission; and

(3) To the extent that a debt owed has not been established by judicial or administrative order, to request a hearing concerning the existence or amount of the debt or the terms of the debt’s repayment schedule. With respect to debts established by a judicial or administrative order, a debtor may request a hearing concerning the payment or other discharge of the debt. The debtor is not entitled to a hearing concerning the terms of the proposed repayment schedule if these terms have been established by written agreement under paragraph (b)(2) of this section.

(c) The notice required by this section may be included with the Commission’s demand letter required by subpart A of this part.

(d) The Commission will keep a copy of the certificate of service indicating the date of mailing of the notice.

§ 204.64 Hearing.

(a) *Request for hearing.* The Commission will order a hearing, which at the Commission’s option may be oral or written, if the debtor submits a written request for a hearing concerning, for debts not previously established by judicial or administrative order, the existence or amount of the debt or the terms of the repayment schedule (for repayment schedules established other than by written agreement under § 204.63(b)(2)), or for debts established by judicial or administrative order, the payment or other discharge of the debt.

(b) *Type of hearing or review.* (1) For purposes of this subpart, whenever the Commission is required to afford a debtor a hearing, the Commission will provide the debtor with a reasonable opportunity for an oral hearing when the Commission determined that the issues in dispute cannot be resolved by review of the documentary evidence, for example, when the validity of the

claim turns on the issue of credibility or veracity.

(2) If the Commission determines that an oral hearing is appropriate, the time and location of the hearing shall be established by the Commission. An oral hearing may, at the debtor's option, be conducted either in-person or by telephone conference. All travel expenses incurred by the debtor in connection with an in-person hearing will be borne by the debtor. All telephonic charges incurred during the hearing will be the responsibility of the agency.

(3) In those cases when an oral hearing is not required by this section, the Commission will nevertheless accord the debtor a "paper hearing," that is, the Commission will decide the issues in dispute based upon a review of the written record.

(c) *Effect of timely request.* Subject to paragraph (l) of this section, if the debtor's written request is received by the Commission on or before the 15th business day following the mailing of the notice of the Commission's intent to seek garnishment, the Commission will not issue a withholding order until the debtor has been provided the requested hearing, and a decision in accordance with paragraphs (i) and (j) of this section has been rendered.

(d) *Failure to timely request a hearing.* If the debtor's written request is received by the agency after the 15th business day following the mailing of the notice of the Commission's intent to seek garnishment, the Commission shall provide a hearing to the debtor. However, the Commission will not delay issuance of a withholding order unless the Commission determines that the delay in filing the request was caused by factors over which the debtor had no control, or the Commission receives information that the Commission believes justifies a delay or cancellation of the withholding order.

(e) *Hearing official.* All hearings shall be presided over by the Commission, or if the Commission so orders, by a hearing official. When the Commission designates that the hearing official shall be an administrative law judge, the Chief Administrative Law Judge shall select, pursuant to 17 CFR 200.30-10, the administrative law judge to preside.

(f) *Procedure.* After the debtor requests a hearing, the hearing official shall notify the debtor of:

(1) The date and time of a telephonic hearing;

(2) The date, time, and location of an in-person oral hearing; or

(3) The deadline for the submission of evidence for a written hearing.

(g) *Burden of proof.* (1) The Commission will have the burden of going forward to prove the existence or amount of the debt.

(2) Thereafter, if the debtor disputes the existence or amount of the debt, the debtor must prove by a preponderance of the evidence that no debt exists or that the amount of the debt is incorrect. In addition, the debtor may present evidence that the terms of the repayment schedule are unlawful, would cause a financial hardship to the debtor, or that collection of the debt may not be pursued due to operation of law.

(h) *Record.* The hearing official will maintain a record of any hearing provided under this section. A hearing is not required to be a formal evidentiary-type hearing, however, witnesses who testify in oral hearings will do so under oath or affirmation.

(i) *Date of decision.* The hearing official shall issue a written opinion stating his or her decision, as soon as practicable, but not later than sixty (60) days after the date on which the request for such hearing was received by the Commission. If the Commission is unable to provide the debtor with a hearing and a decision is not rendered within sixty (60) days after the receipt of the request for such hearing:

(1) A withholding order will not be issued until the hearing is held and a decision rendered; or

(2) If a withholding order had previously been issued to the debtor's employer, the withholding order will be suspended beginning on the 61st day after the receipt of the hearing request and continuing until a hearing is held and a decision is rendered.

(j) *Content of decision.* The written decision shall include:

(1) A summary of the facts presented;

(2) The findings, analysis and conclusions; and

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(3) The terms of any repayment schedules, if applicable.

(k) *Finality of agency action.* Unless the Commission on its own initiative orders review of a decision by a hearing official pursuant to 17 CFR 201.431(c), a decision by a hearing official shall become the final decision of the Commission for the purpose of judicial review under the Administrative Procedure Act.

(l) *Failure to appear.* In the absence of good cause shown, a debtor who fails to appear at a scheduled hearing will be deemed as not having timely filed a request for a hearing.

§ 204.65 Wage garnishment order.

(a) Unless the Commission receives information that the Commission believes justifies a delay or cancellation of the withholding order, the Commission will send, by first class mail, a withholding order to the debtor's employer within 30 days after the debtor fails to make a timely request for a hearing (*i.e.*, within 15 business days after the mailing of the notice of the Commission's intent to seek garnishment) or, if a timely request for a hearing is made by the debtor, within 30 days after a decision to issue a withholding order becomes final.

(b) The withholding order sent to the employer will be in the form prescribed by the Secretary of the Treasury, on the Commission's letterhead, and signed by the Chairperson or his or her delegatee. The order will contain the information necessary for the employer to comply with the withholding order. This information includes the debtor's name, address, and social security number, as well as instructions for withholding and information as to where payments should be sent.

(c) The Commission will keep a copy of the certificate of service indicating the date of mailing of the order.

(d) *Certification by employer.* Along with the withholding order, the Commission will send to the employer a certification in a form prescribed by the Secretary of the Treasury. The employer shall complete and return the certification to the Commission within the time frame prescribed in the instructions to the form. The certification will address matters such as in-

formation about the debtor's employment status and disposable pay available for withholding.

(e) *Amounts withheld.* (1) After receipt of the garnishment order issued under this section, the employer shall deduct from all disposable pay paid to the applicable debtor during each pay period the amount of garnishment described in paragraph (e)(2) of this section.

(2) Subject to the provisions of paragraphs (e)(3) and (e)(4) of this section, the amount of garnishment shall be the lesser of:

(i) The amount indicated on the garnishment order up to 15% of the debtor's disposable pay; or

(ii) The amount set forth in 15 U.S.C. 1673(a)(2) (Restriction on Garnishment). The amount set forth at U.S.C. 1673(a)(2) is the amount by which the debtor's disposable pay exceeds an amount equivalent to thirty times the minimum wage. *See* 29 CFR 870.10.

(3) When a debtor's pay is subject to withholding orders with priority, the following shall apply:

(i) Unless otherwise provided by Federal law, withholding orders issued under this section shall be paid in the amounts set forth under paragraph (e)(2) of this section and shall have priority over other withholding orders which are served later in time. However, withholding orders for family support shall have priority over withholding orders issued under this section.

(ii) If amounts are being withheld from a debtor's pay pursuant to a withholding order served on an employer before a withholding order issued pursuant to this section, or if a withholding order for family support is served on an employer at any time, the amounts withheld pursuant to the withholding order issued under this section shall be the lesser of:

(A) The amount calculated under paragraph (e)(2) of this section; or

(B) An amount equal to 25% of the debtor's disposable pay less the amount(s) withheld under the withholding order(s) with priority.

(iii) If a debtor owes more than one debt to the Commission, the Commission may issue multiple withholding orders. The total amount garnished from the debtor's pay for such orders